3. Feasts and Manners

572 The word compere [literally: pal] is in usage in all of the
177 islands where there are Caribs -- among the French when they trade with their Carib friends, and among the Caribs when they speak in French to those with whom they have become friends. A Frenchman gives his name to a Carib and the Carib gives his name to the Frenchman. Even if he does not give such a man his trade, at least he prefers him to others, and this does not fail to give him some profit. [320]

422 The Caribs have so few belongings that they are able to carry all of them with them, without having any desire to acquire more.
437 Thus when the Caribs have a tortoise which they want to exchange for a knife, they will not trade it if you should offer them two axes for it. The reason is that they have a need for the knife, although the axes are worth more. Our own possessions, although high-priced and scarce, would have no value among them. [291] The Caribs do not use terms for buying and selling. They ask without haggling and one gives the article to them for that which is offered without difficulty. [312]

511 The Caribs cannot fail to rank as church paupers, and to have the love of Jesus Christ, and to be accepted by the Kingdom of Heaven. For they possess neither gold nor silver and they have neither bag nor wallet, nor coat nor staff, and they do not even have the desire to obtain them. A hut to protect them from the elements satisfies their ambition. Tomali [tamale?] is their stew, and crabs are the
415 most delicate food that they have. Calabashes serve them for crockery, and baskets serve as chests. Earthen pots are used as kettles and
574 cauldrons. When they change islands and when they go to another
[264] carbet, drink and food are not refused them. They reciprocate equally to others in a similar situation, provided that the others do not arrive too late, for they save nothing for the following day. [316] The Caribs ask fearlessly, and give freely, when they have something. [273]

574 The Caribs have their accustomed civilities. One particular man
● 576 is in charge of receiving those who visit. He makes ready a hammock for them if they are important, or a stool if they are common, and has them sit. He summons a woman who carries to the guest a small wicker table which is laden with cassava and other things and it is set in front of him. Then the man in charge says, "My compere, this is for you to eat." The visitor replies with a thank you. If the cassava is unfolded

574 it signifies that all of it is intended for him, but if it is folded double
576 he understands that he should only eat at his discretion and should leave the rest. Others come over even if they have just finished their meal, and they share what they have brought. Because of friendship they eat again. The only trouble I had with them was when I refused to eat a second time. However, after I had explained to them our way of life they were no longer offended. I have not noticed
[574] that they have particular words for breakfast, dinner, and supper, although they eat meals regularly. [214]

When a Carib arrives at a carbet there is a man who is responsible for giving him a good reception. He shows the guest to a hammock, has food and drink carried to him, and entertains him. At the end of the meal the host goes to everyone and invites all to come and greet the visitor. The older men greet him first, and all the others after that, and the visitor responds. After this greeting they talk with him, for no one approaches him or interrupts him while he is eating. When the guest is ready to leave he goes before everyone present and says good-by to each one, and the others reply. [345]

When a captain has a drinking party or a banquet he choses a man who goes from carbet to carbet where he is well entertained, and when this man leaves he steps before his hosts and invites them to assemble and requests them to come to the feast. [266]

The boutámon is a small table which is covered with cassava and some meat, and which is presented to a visitor. [94] "To the health of my friend," replies the one for whom a toast has been given. One toast is not enough and a supplement is necessary, as they say in the islands. [353]

576 "Why does he call me my mother? I called him my father -- at least if he did not call me daughter he should call me sister." The Caribs don't call each other Mr. or Miss, etc. If they call you "father" you should reply "my son." Once, meeting Henri Comte, I said "Good morning my captain." Both he and the people with him laughed at me for a long time because of this greeting which is not customary among them. [97]

574 "Did you come?" This is the greeting that the women give each
576 other when they arrive in a house where there is one of their relatives or acquaintances whom they visit directly at their house. A seat is offered to them, and if they are old or well-liked they are offered a bed. Food and drink are presented. Nevertheless, they do not receive

574 the civilities which it is customary to render to men. If someone
576 else greets them they respond with the women's greeting. [155]

When Caribs meet after a long period of absence from each other, they embrace each other impelled by reasons of joy or sadness. [516] Mutually resting their head on the shoulder of the other, each rests one knee on the ground. They begin a sad chant and go so far as to weep and sob, even continuing to weep for a long time after. This is especially true when the visitor arrives during a drinking party as I have seen happen at the arrival of a Balibi. [233]

302 When the Caribs go to feasts their women paint them red and wash their faces and wipe them. Then the women spread their fingers which are reddened with paint and press them on their husband's faces, which disguises their features so well that one has difficulty recognizing them. [298]

293 The skin of the jaguar has short, red hair. All the Caribs who have been to South America have such a skin. When they come to their feasts each carries his own in ostentation trailing it ten or twelve feet behind him, with the claws of the Mansfénix hawk arranged on two sticks across their backs. They believe that this communicates to them courage and valor. When they are gashed with the teeth of
752 an agouti and are bleeding they grind up the jaguar skin and rub the powder on the wound. This heals the wound very well without any inflammation or boils, even when they have been previously rubbed with pepper and pimento. [100]

785 I have seen young men at feasts stand in the middle of the carbet with their hands upon their heads allowing anyone to beat them with arrows, similar to blows given with the flat of a sword. I have seen others just after the greater part of their bodies had been gashed, who allowed people to rub them all over with the body of a Mansfénix together with a great deal of pepper which had been crushed between two rocks. God knows that they become hot after that. Others, not at the time of these drinking parties, stood up in the same place, and old women beat them with pineapples leaves which they hold by the points. With the spines they scratch them by dragging them across their bodies, for the pineapple leaves are like saws except that the spines are more treacherously sharp and pointed. All of this is designated by the term "He has passed by the lances." [132]

861 they are seldom corrected even if they mistreat their fathers and mothers; most of them are not even reprimanded for such terrible conduct.

●576 Nakedness does not shame them [the children], and they belch, fart, and carry on all the other necessities of nature without any re-
868 straint. Their fathers and mothers do not teach them anything except how to fish, to shoot with a bow, to swim, and to weave small baskets and cotton hammocks.

881 When the boys and girls have reached the age of puberty they fast for three weeks or one month and their skin is cut with agouti teeth as we mentioned previously. When the Caribs want to make one of their young men a captain or raise him to the rank of warrior, the young man obtains in advance a bird of prey called Mancefenil, [Mansfénix] which he feeds until the time it is destined for this ceremony. When this day arrives the father invites the most distinguished and oldest of his friends, and when they come together he has his son sit on a stool and encourages him to be courageous in his battles and to revenge himself on his enemies. He then takes the bird by the feet and breaks and crushes its head by striking it against the head of his son. Although he is almost stunned by the blows he has received, the son must not even raise his eyebrows if he wishes to be considered a brave warrior. Then the father mangles and crushes the body of the bird and soaks it in water with a quantity of pimentos. He cuts the skin of his son all over the body and washes him with this spiced water and finally gives him the heart of the Mancefenil bird to eat. This is done, they say, so that he will become more courageous.

Afterwards a cotton hammock is hung for him from the roof of the house and he is laid stretched out in it. He is to stay there without eating or drinking or moving in any way until his strength is almost gone. They firmly believe that if he should twist himself during this time he would remain in this position for the rest of his life. When the son has passed this test, which is so rigorous that occasionally one of them dies, he passes as a valorous soldier, even though he may very often be only a coward.

584 It should be noticed in speaking of their marriages that the young people do not know what it is to make love before they are married. When they wish to marry a girl who does not belong to them by right

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553 probability, of their forefather's conversion and of the name of his white godfather. Such today are Dauville, Lucien, Viville, John, Darroux, Benjamin, etc. But already these names are falling into disuse and being forgotten even by their bearers, who designate the individual by attaching the patronymic to the name—so, Norbert John, the son of John Jules, the son of Jules Benjamin. Friends sometimes "swap" or exchange names.

551 The Carib of Dominica retains the Indian's traditional dislike of the indiscriminate use of his name. In ordinary forms of address he almost always uses "compère," "commère" (the old "gossip"), "cousin," "chef," "babe," "boy," etc. He habitually refers to people by a nickname (Popote, Fanfan) or by abbreviating the real name (Ma' Ham for Madame Hamilton). When traveling or staying in some other part of the island or abroad, he invariably changes his name, adopting for the time what Roth calls a "nom de voyage." The reason for this, as explained to me by a Carib friend, is that "nobody can do you anything (piaï, charm) when they do not know your right name." This idea that the name is part and parcel of the thing or person to whom it belongs, and the adoption of a false denomer, in order to trick the nefarious genii, is, I believe, peculiarly Indian. Thus, before going to the provision grounds or to the woods
[777 for food, a mother of the old school will tell her children that she is
784] going to "fouiller fourmis" (dig for ants), fearing that she would be unlucky and return empty-handed should she pronounce the real name, and say (for example) that she was going to look for wawa (wild yam: *Rajana cordata* L.).

● 576 Forms of greeting are seldom used by the Caribs. Even after a long absence, a man will arrive with a simple "I am come," and take leave, before a long separation, with no more than "I am going."

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[264] Women and children eat in the kitchen apart from the men and after the latter have finished. I understand that this habit is peculiar, in Dominica, to the Caribs; though it would seem to be more a matter of convenience than custom in a community where the women do all their own housework. Vestiges of taboo seem to subsist with regard to the eating of certain foods. One old woman gave as the reason for not eating a species of sea crab, called àgaya, that the
[842] latter sometimes "had to do with women." She averred that this crab, were it to meet a girl or woman on the beach, would crawl up and urinate on her leg, thus rendering her pregnant for him. We read that the Caribs of other days would not eat hen, turtle, or eel for fear of thereby acquiring the unworthy characteristics of these beasts. There are Caribs in Dominica today who, for similar reasons, will not touch the meat of shark, conger eel, or an elsewhere widely consumed variety of fish, locally known as "vive."